

Don't Let The Sun Set On You by JakeyFryMason011

Series: [Branches \[3\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Lucas Sinclair, Lucas Sinclair's Parents, Maxine "Max" Mayfield

Relationships: Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2018-10-02

Updated: 2018-11-29

Packaged: 2022-04-23 03:06:43

Rating: Mature

Warnings: Graphic Depictions Of Violence

Chapters: 3

Words: 2,542

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Hawkins, Indiana is no longer a sundown town. It officially allowed families of color inside its limits, but unofficially old prejudices still remain. Lucas's father has been offered a job, but little do they know that this could endanger their lives.

WARNING: Usage of the n-word.

1. Moving Day

Author's Note:

How many of you know what sundown towns are? For those who don't know, sundown towns were towns that, by practice, kept anyone who wasn't white from living or working within its limits. Signs were posted before the town: "Nigger, don't let the sun set on you in this town." "Read and Run, Nigger. If You Can't Read, Run Anyway." These towns were VERY MUCH REAL. Some of them still refuse to let in those of color, especially blacks. Here's a story to explore the past of half of my blood.

"Are you sure about this?" Lucas's mother asked again.

"I'm sure it's safe now," his father said. "Hawkins isn't sundown anymore."

"But what if--"

The thought was too terrible to finish.

"It'll be okay," John said. "The sheriff promised us some protection."

Mary muttered something about the promises of whites.

Just outside the town limits, there was a sign that said "Nigger, Don't Let The Sun Set On Your Back in Hawkins, Indiana."

John's hands tightened on the wheel.

"We shouldn't be here," Lucas whispered to himself. "We shouldn't have come."

"Here we are," John said as they pulled into the driveway.

The house was pleasant, deep blue and moderately sized. The grass was long but that could be easily cut down once they bought a lawn mower.

John got out of the car, followed by Mary. Lucas hesitated, then opened the door.

It was cold and dry that day. Lucas's father walked to the trailer in the back and opened the hatch. "Lucas, come help me carry this."

Lucas looked over at the house next door, and saw a dark-haired boy, maybe his age, looking at him curiously. In the windows of the house next door, a man and a woman watched Mary and John with apprehension.

The door opened to the house, and they were greeted by a dusty but spacious space. "Just needs a little dusting," Mary said, looking around. They set the boxes on the floor.

The furniture was far back in a truck, and wouldn't be expected to arrive until a few days. Until then, they would have to make do with what they had.

"Why don't we all go for a drive?" John offered. "Just to see how things are?"

Just to make sure it was safe, he didn't say.

Lucas opted to stay home, and while his parents were out he sat on his front stoop and watched people walk by.

A girl with red hair cruised by slowly on a skateboard. He noted her with caution, trying to determine if she was a threat or not.

"Hey, you," she said.

That was what struck him. She hadn't said "Hey, nigger" or "Hey, dark boy." He blinked at her.

She stopped and kicked her skateboard into her hands. "Hey, I'm talking to you."

"Hi," Lucas said. He still couldn't tell if she was a threat. Was she going to beat him up with the skateboard?

"You're the new neighbors, right?" she asked, walking towards him. Up close, he saw a smattering of freckles across her face. She was sort of pretty.

What other black people do you even know? he wanted to say. Instead he only said "Yeah, why?"

"Oh," was all she said. "What's your name?"

Why was she talking to him civilly? Did she like being made fun of?

"Lucas," he said.

"Cool," she said. "My name's Max."

He blinked. "Isn't that--"

"A boy's name, yes. My actual name is Maxine. But I hate that name."

"Oh." He wasn't saying much, but he had to be careful. One false step and that skateboard would collide with his skull. "That's cool."

She looked at him funny, and said "You're quiet, huh?"

It's the only way for me to make it without being killed.

He shrugged. Max smirked at him. "You're a weird kid, you know that?"

"I tend to stand out wherever I go."

She blinked at him, and laughed.

He hadn't meant it as a joke.

"Whatever," she said. "Do you start school here soon?"

"Yeah. Monday."

"Cool. I'll show you around the school then, if you want."

Why are you being nice to me? Do you want to be strung up along with me?

"That would be nice, I guess."

"You'll be the first colored kid here. That ought to be interesting. See you then." And just like that, she went off, red hair spilling behind her.

Yes, it really would be interesting. But her idea of interesting was not the same as his idea of interesting.

2. We Don't Want No Darkies In This School

Summary for the Chapter:

Lucas's first day in school.
All does not go well.

His father dropped him off. "Now, you be careful," he said in a hushed tone. "We don't know how folks will be with you in class. Anything happens, I want you to tell me. Understand?"

Lucas nodded, glancing at the large brick building as thought it spiraled down to hell.

For a colored kid, however, it might as well have.

He got out of the car and walked up to the front. Kids milled around him, looking at him. None of them harassed him. But none of them talked to him either. They simply looked on with curiosity, both passive and aggressive, as he made his way to the front doors.

"Hey, you! Luke! Lucas! Whatever!"

Lucas turned around, bracing himself for the fists and fury, but instead was met by the red-haired girl (Max, right?) strolling up to him. Her skateboard was tucked under her arm.

"Hi," was all he said. Max grinned. "Dude, relax. I'm not going to smash your head in with my board."

You could never be too sure, but even so Lucas fell into stride next to her, albeit nervously. Up close, she really was pretty. Her hair was red and seemingly uncombed, judging by a few loose strands that poked their heads out here and there. She was pale, almost as to a vampire, and her eyes were an icy blue color. Freckles splashed around her face.

Then, he smacked himself. What was he doing?

They opened the doors of the school, and Lucas hesitated, taking a breath, and dived in.

He stood before the doors, his back to the outside, looking around the hall. Students, all white, milled around him, some shooting him looks from curious to hostile.

He felt himself getting nervous. His breath got short and his vision tunneled. What was he doing here? He didn't belong. He needed to get out.

"Hey, earth to Lucas?" Max said, bringing him out of his zone. Lucas blinked. "Sorry, what?"

"I asked you what your first class was," she said with a smirk, but in those oddly ice-colored eyes he saw something else.

Concern? No, it couldn't be.

"Oh," Lucas said, "Um, let me see."

His first class was biology, and Max led him to where his locker would be.

He noticed the looks they got, and the racial shouts directed at them.

Max ignored them. "Here," she said. He thanked her and opened the door, loading some of his books inside.

Someone purposefully knocked him on the back and the books toppled to the floor. "Watch it, darkie," a large, ugly-faced boy sneered, pushing past.

Lucas looked after him helplessly and reached down to retrieve his books.

He went to pick up his math book when a pale hand got there first. In surprise, he looked up to see Max smiling at him. "Here," she said.

"Thanks..." Lucas said, hesitantly taking it and putting it in his locker.

"Come on," she said, tugging his sleeve. "Biology is this way."

His classes were awful. His classmates taunted him and tormented him, and sometimes the teachers joined in too.

Only a few--a pretty brown-haired girl, the dark-haired boy who lived next to him, a small boy with long brown hair that went past his ears, a curly-haired boy with a hat--didn't join in, aside from Max herself.

Exhausted, he dragged himself to lunch.

He looked around the lunchroom anxiously, avoiding the staring eyes of the others, and made his way towards a corner table, unoccupied.

"Hey! Sinclair!"

He turned around, looking for the source of the voice, and found Max waving at him from a table.

Looking around, he walked over to where she was sitting. She, too, was alone, and seemed perfectly content that way.

"Sit," she offered, chewing loudly on a sandwich. Lucas smiled awkwardly and nervously sat down at the table.

She grinned at him. "How was today so far?"

He only gave her a grimace, but she smiled. "I get it. Sucked dick, I bet."

Lucas only nodded, poking at his food.

"You know, you're allowed to talk to me," Max said. "I'm not like the other racist assholes in this school."

"Why are you being so nice to me?" Lucas blurted. Max blinked at him. "Huh?"

"Why are you being so nice to me? Do you like being made fun of? Do you want to be marked as a 'nigger-lover'? What's the deal?"

"You just...I don't know," Max said. "You just seem like you could really use a friend, especially here." He looked up from his hands to face her, and she smiled sincerely. "You seem like a really nice person, and I wanted to make you feel...I dunno...more welcome. Also--" here she rolled her eyes "--I'm not exactly super popular here, dude."

He had to smile at that.

Max reached over the table and touched his hand gently.

He had been doing all right until the last class.

He was at his locker, putting books in, when someone pushed him. He fell forward against the locker, just in time for someone to grab his shirt and spin him around.

"Who said you could come here anyway?" a boy much bigger than Lucas hissed.

"Yeah, nobody wants you monkeys here," someone else said. A fist collided with his stomach.

He was on the ground with fists pummeling him everywhere, and he huddled up, trying to protect himself.

They left him with one last "Go back to the jungle, nigger."

"Lucas?" a new voice asked. He picked himself up to be faced with Max.

Oh *great*.

"Oh, um, hi," he said, trying to act like nothing happened. Blood dripped from his nose.

"What the hell happened?" she asked, stepping forward. Her blue eyes looked unnaturally bright and cold, like sunlight reflecting off a frozen ocean.

Lucas looked at his shoes.

"Lucas," she said insistently.

"I got beat up," he muttered, shouldering his bag. "It's fine, really."

"It sure as fuck isn't *fine*, Lucas," Max snarled, walking beside him. "Nothing about the way everybody treats you is 'fine'."

She was angry, extraordinarily so. Her hair almost looked like it was on fire and her fists were clenched. "This is such bullshit," she muttered. "Such fucking bullshit."

"It's really okay," Lucas said quietly. She glared at him. "You call that okay?" she asked, gesturing to his face. "Come here."

He stopped, and she gently wiped some of the blood from his nose with a handkerchief, a surprisingly sweet gesture. "How bad does it hurt?"

"Not much," Lucas lied. She poked his nose and he flinched.

"That's what I thought," Max said. "Come on, I'll walk out with you."

"You really don't--"

"I'm walking out with you whether you like it or not."

She stuck close to him, their shoulders pressed together as they walked. Several people recoiled as they walked by, though if it was Lucas himself, his bloodied face or Max's ferocious glare he couldn't be sure.

Lucas spotted his father's car, and turned. "Here's my dad."

"Okay," she said. "I hope your face is better."

"Thanks," he said. She smiled at him and walked away, her red hair flowering in the wind.

Lucas got into the car.

3. The Lecture

Summary for the Chapter:

Max faces her step-father.

Notes for the Chapter:

Introducing the World's Biggest Fucking Dickhead:
Neil Hargrove!

Her father was waiting for her when she opened the door.

"Maxine," he said, his tone severe.

"Hi" was the only thing she said.

"How was school?" he asked her, but Max knew he only was being polite.

"Fine," Max said, shrugging off her backpack.

"Billy tells me you made a new friend," Neil said, crossing his arms.

Shit. Max froze. "Is that so?" she said in a would-be casual tone.

"It is," Neil said, and he sat down, facing her. "Can you tell me why you decided to make friends with a little n--black boy?"

At least he was trying to censor his language in front of her.

"He seems nice," Max said, not even bothering to deny it. "People pick on him."

"Can't blame them, not wanting someone of his kind in school. Hopper made a mistake, letting them in here," Neil muttered. Louder, to Max, he said "He seems nice, huh?"

"Yeah," Max replied shortly.

Niel sighed, rubbing his face. "He can't be trusted, Maxine. Darkies, they're all the same. He'll force himself on you the minute he has the

chance."

"But--"

"Now you listen to me!" Niel said, suddenly angry. "Don't you question me. All of his kind, they're all savages, every one of them! They're no better than animals, you hear?"

"Lucas is better--"

He slapped her across the face.

Max staggered back.

Neil glared at her for a second, then blinked. He looked at the red mark on her face, then his hand.

"Maxine--"

She got up and ran to her room. He followed, protesting "Maxine, I'm sorry--"

"Leave me alone," Max said.

"I didn't mean t--"

She slammed the door in his face.

The door locked, she buried her head under her pillows. She hated everyone, the entire town, with their horrible thoughts and their hatred of anything remotely different.

Max thought of Lucas, and her stomach leaped with fear--not of him, but of what might happen to him. She had a sick image of Lucas with his feet dangling ten feet from the ground under a tree with a rope around his neck, and wanted to throw up.

She didn't know what to do.

Her mother forced her to come out for dinner, and she sat at the table, picking at her food. When dinner was over, so made to rush to her room, but Neil put his arm on her shoulder. "Maxine...I'm sorry. I

didn't mean to hit you."

"My name is Max," was her only reply. Then she threw his arm off of her shoulder and slammed her door.

Susan tentatively knocked on the door and opened it.

Max was crouched at her desk.

"Hey there," Susan said softly, caressing Max's back. "You okay?"

"Fine," Max said.

"Neil...he means well," Susan said. "Really, he does, Maxie. He just is concerned about you hanging out with the little negr--"

"Don't say it," Max said harshly. "Don't you say it."

"It's what he--"

"He has a *name*, Mom. His name is Lucas, and he's the nicest kid I know."

Susan bit her lip, her own prejudices clashing furiously with her conscience. "But don't you think--"

"That hanging around him is a bad idea? Since when have I ever cared about what other people think?"

"Honey, he's *black*, this...*Lucas*." She said his name like it left a bad taste in her mouth.

"Yeah? And?"

"I don't know where this attitude is coming from--"

"You want to know, mom? It's because I'm done! I'm sick of literally everyone in this fucking town being racist! It's always 'if those niggers come into town, we'll lynch them', but did it ever occur to you that maybe they're human too?"

"Maxine," Susan said. She looked shocked, something Max both hated and loved. "Where is this coming from?"

"Just get out of my room," Max said, putting her head back on her desk. "Go!" Susan gazed at her daughter before closing the door on her way out.

It was then that Max allowed herself to cry.

Notes for the Chapter:

What was interesting for me about writing Neil's character is that, even though he's clearly wrong, he truly is convinced his racist views are right and that he's only doing the right thing to try and protect his family. He's an asshole, but his end-goal, though flawed, is to protect his family out of misguided fear. This was the mindset of many people in sundown towns: they acted out of pure hatred, fueled by helpless, mindless fear.

Thanks for reading, you guys!